GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:250
ANSWERED ON:20.03.2002
ERADICATION OF BLINDNESS
JAYASHREE BANERJEE;RUPCHAND MURMU

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn towards the news-item captioned `number of blind would be double in 20 years` appearing in the `Times of India` dated January 21, 2002;

(b) if so, the facts of the matter reported therein;

(c) whether despite major advancements in eye care more people in the country suffer from complete loss of sight, brought on largely by treatable condition, now, than a decade ago;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether any worldwide campaign was launched by the World Health Organisation for elimination of avoidable blindness; and

(f) if so, the details regarding the medical assistance extended in favour of India by the WHO?

Answer

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C.P. THAKUR)

(a)to(f) A statement is laid on the table of the Lok Sabha.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 250 FOR 20.3.2002

(a) & (b) Yes, Sir. The estimates published in the Times of India dated 21.01.02 are based on a study limited to Andhra Pradesh only and therefore cannot be extrapolated to the entire country. Estimated blind persons in the year 2001 would be about 15 million projected on the basis of National Survey (1986-89). The number of cataract operations carried out annually are in excess of the estimated new cases every year. In view of this, there is no reason to believe that the pool of blind persons is increasing over the years.

(c) & (d) Nearly 80% of blind persons can be treated for restoration of their vision through Cataract Surgery, provision of glasses and management of other eye problems. Performance of Cataract Surgery has been steadily increasing from 16 lakhs in 1992-93 to 37 lakhs during 2000-2001.

(e) &(f) Yes, Sir. A `VISION 2020 : The Right To Sight` global initiative has been launched by WHO. A comprehensive plan of action is being prepared by a working group constituted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on `Vision 2020: The Right to Sight` initiative in India. The plan includes controlling blindness due to cataract, glaucoma, diabetes, refractive errors and corneal blindness with special focus on prevention and control of blindness in children. The Vision 2020 initiative aims at reducing avoidable blindness by the year 2020. This initiative is being assisted by WHO for which US$ 2 lakhs have been sanctioned for biennium 2001-2002. However, the programme in the field will not be eligible for any funding from WHO.